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TAGS: ECON ETRD PREL TU  
SUBJECT: THE PKK, CROSS-BORDER ATTACK, AND A NEW  
CONSTITUTION: AN AKP-DTP DEBATE

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 23rd, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) hosted a conference on security and human rights. Panelists Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat -- a Justice and Development Party (AKP) vice chair, and Head of the AKP Parliamentary Constitution Commission responsible for drafting a new constitution -- and Aysel Tugluk -- Democratic Society Party (DTP) Diyarbakir MP -- engaged in a sharp exchange over the AKP's "imposition" of nomenclature on the DTP regarding the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the usefulness of cross-border military action, and elements of the new draft constitution. END SUMMARY

THE PKK & CROSS-BORDER ATTACK:

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¶12. (SBU) On October 23rd, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) hosted an international conference in Istanbul entitled "Providing Security and Protecting Human Rights." The highlight of the conference was a heated debate between Aysel Tugluk and Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, two ethnic-Kurdish politicians with sharply different views. Firat is a Justice and Development Party (AKP) Council of Founders Member, Head of the AKP Parliamentary Constitutional Commission, and an outspoken opponent of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Tugluk, on the other hand, is Founder and Co-chair of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) -- which has links to the PKK. Tugluk sees the Kurdish question as a political/social one, rather than as a security issue. Military action would only serve to destabilize the region and encourage further radicalization, she argued. No good has come from "violent, reactionary policy" in the Southeast for the past thirty years, she claimed. At the conference, she argued the DTP refuses to declare the PKK a terrorist organization, despite AKP "imposition," because it would imply DTP consent to a military solution. She warned fellow panelist Firat that a majority of ballots did not grant the AKP a mandate to conduct unilateral military action.

¶13. (SBU) Firat responded, asking: "Do you consider the PKK a terrorist group or not?" He argued that DTP has the legal obligation, and a Turkish duty, to isolate illegal groups that encourage instability, not court them. Political/social options do not work with groups that refuse to lay down arms, he argued. "Ballots are for the Parliament and guns are for the mountains -- choose one." Parliament approved cross-border operations because no other choice remains, he claimed.

THE NEW CONSTITUTION:

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¶4. (SBU) With respect to the draft constitution, Tugluk accused the AKP of going it alone. AKP controls the office of the President, the office of the Prime Minister, and three-hundred plus deputies, so they think they can accomplish everything by themselves, she claimed. Even with all that power there are still problems because AK refuses to cooperate, she argued. DTP has offered, as have other parties, to work with AKP on a new text. Tugluk says DTP has asked for explicit inclusion of the EU Copenhagen Criteria -- respect for and protection of minority rights, in the new draft. "More liberty leads to more democracy leads to less terrorism." However, according to Tugluk, DTP does not seek specific mention of Kurds.

¶5. (SBU) Firat argued that entrenched interest groups, particularly the Higher Education Board (YOK), still prevented even the most powerful parties from acting. He claimed that as long as Turkish institutions retain the ability to challenge the sovereignty of the people, as granted in Article Six of the current constitution, no real reform could be made. Regarding Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, he said there are people who use laws for purposes other than that for which they were written. During his law school days, the controversy was over articles related to communism -- 301 is just the newest subject of criticism; once it is amended, Western critics will just find another excuse to attack Turkey, he argued.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: While Firat urged Tugluk to stay on topic (i.e. The constitutional draft), it is significant that he remained patiently engaged in debate, even while Tugluk continued to deviate to the Kurdish question. Firat's eagerness to continue was even more remarkable given that once detoured, it was Tugluk who refused to answer key questions (e.g. is the PKK a terrorist organization or not?). Despite DTP links to the PKK, Tugluk continued to defend the DTP's stance of 'neutrality' in the face of fresh reports of terrorist violence. How hard is it for a member of parliament to denounce, unequivocally, violence against the very citizens they represent? This is the question that many in the audience walked away with, and one that the DTP should be forced to eventually answer. END COMMENT

WIENER